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LETTER DATED 25 MAY 1995 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

We welcome the substance of yesterday's ultimatum by the Commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding heavy weapons. We also welcome today's limited actions by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in conjunction with the ultimatum and appreciate the courage and commitment of the pilots involved in this overdue response. With respect to the request/"ultimatum", we expressed our willingness in February 1994 to comply voluntarily, even though no such compliance is required of us by Security Council resolutions or could be consistent with our sovereignty. Once again, we renew our offer to comply voluntarily in conjunction with a sincere UNPROFOR effort to keep its own commitment.

In the first sentence of the communiqué of 24 May 1995 from the Commander of UNPROFOR in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the statement assesses that "both the Bosnian Serb and the Bosnian Government armies continued to flout the heavy weapons exclusion zone and the United Nations-declared safe area".

First, no new ultimatum would have been necessary if, in fact, the first ultimatum had been honoured by the United Nations Command (which ignored so many increasingly violative attacks upon Sarajevo and its population in recent weeks and explicitly rejected calls for air strikes against the besiegers);

Second, the so-called Bosnian Serbs have engaged in a steadily increasing project of reintroducing heavy weapons into the exclusion zone and employing such against the civilian population. Once UNPROFOR clearly exhibited its lack of will to stop these violations, only then did our Government respond in self-defence;

Third, three parties must, in fact, honour the exclusion zone/safe area: the so-called Bosnian Serbs, the Bosnian Government forces and UNPROFOR (and by extension, NATO). The Serbians were the first to violate the exclusion zone. When UNPROFOR failed to respond to this violation and honour its commitments, UNPROFOR was the second to violate the exclusion zone. Do not then expect our Government forces to watch idly. In this case, after the so-called Bosnian Serbs, it is UNPROFOR that has engaged in the "flaunting" of the exclusion zone.

Therefore, we do not appreciate being lectured to or threatened by a command which, by its own words, did not react to earlier Serbian violations and murder of our civilians because such command gave first priority and concern regarding Serbian reprisals. When UNPROFOR and NATO are faithfully committed to executing their mandate as their first priority, then we are prepared to delegate the responsibility to protect and deter attacks against our civilian population. However, when UNPROFOR, by deed and word, expresses its own intention not to respond to attacks upon and tolerate the ever-tightening strangulation of Sarajevo (and thereby flouts its own commitments), we must fully reassume our sovereign obligation to defend our population and city;

Fourthly, now that the UNPROFOR Command once again seems to be verbalizing its preparedness to live up to its previous obligations, then we also can redelegate that relevant part of this responsibility.

But, to the UNPROFOR commanders and spokesmen, we say: please save the righteous and self-serving preaching. It is hollow and pretentious to preach when you bear so much of the fault for the current deteriorated situation, and we have so many more murdered and maimed innocents to suffer as a consequence of your lack of will to carry out your mandate, your duty. It is shameful that even now efforts are made to hide your culpability by lecturing the victims and those who had no option but to compensate for your lack of will to keep the commitments you were entrusted with. When in our last meeting in Sarajevo on 30 April 1995 I directly informed Mr. Akashi, General Janvier, General Smith and other UNPROFOR functionaries of the shelling of the blue route within the exclusion zone which I had personally witnessed, their collective reaction was that they did not have the means to respond on the ground and feared the consequences of Serbian reprisals to air strikes. When I then stated that the only option for me was to recommend to my Government that we redeploy our heavy weapons in the area to compensate for this lack of will or means to maintain the commitment regarding the exclusion zone, there was only a shrug of the shoulders and indifference. At that time they could have said, do not do that - there is no need - we will keep our commitment. Instead, they only reasserted their vulnerability and concern for reprisals.

We will cooperate. UNPROFOR, and by extension NATO, this time, keep your promises. In the meantime, once again, we express our thanks for today's step and voice our sincere wish that this expression of will shall be maintained and that in the future, commitments will not be marginalized or forgotten.

Finally, let me emphasize that our Government and I, personally, have the highest respect for the courage and commitment of the individuals serving within UNPROFOR and NATO. We also appreciate the most difficult task of UNPROFOR commanders and civilian representatives. But, once again to the UNPROFOR commanders and spokesmen we emphasize: you cannot avoid your responsibility or danger by marginalizing your mandate. And we will certainly not sit by idly or, worse, allow you to deflect culpability by your degradation of the moral or legal position of our country, soldiers and people.

May I ask for your kind assistance in circulating this letter as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Muhamed SACIRBEY
Ambassador
Permanent Representative